

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 24, 2003

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Ensuring the vitality of the child nutrition programs will be one of our key priorities over the coming year. A number of child nutrition programs are up for reauthorization including: the School Breakfast Program, School Lunch Program, Special Milk Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, Summer Food Service Program, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). Other related-programs of interest to us include the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program and Team Nutrition (nutrition education and training).

We believe that it is essential to highlight and address two particularly important objectives as we review our child nutrition programs. First, we must ensure that these important programs provide eligible children across the nation with access to enough food of the right quality. Second, we must make sure that these programs have an impact on the staggering rates of overweight and obesity among our youth. Both of these objectives have short and long-term consequences for the health and well-being of our children and must serve as our primary guide for the re-authorization of the child nutrition programs.

We are concerned about children across the country but recognize that some problems disproportionately affect children in rural communities, the inner-cities, and those who live on Indian Reservations. Certain provisions may need to be specifically tailored to those populations.

To achieve those objectives, we request that you include in the your budget, the funding needed to make progress in these areas:

- We strongly support action designed to reduce and/or contain overweight and obesity rates among children through the child nutrition programs. Issues to be addressed include: quality and nutritional content of school meals; increasing the availability of healthier foods and decreasing the sale of foods that compete with school meals; expanding the availability of fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy products; and enhancing nutrition education and physical activity programs.

- Evaluating and, if needed, adjusting reimbursement rates for school meals and after-school programs.
- Eliminating the reduced-price category for school meals. Under current economic conditions, the 3-tiered system of meal service (free, reduced-price, and paid) places the working poor at a disadvantage because they may not have even the forty cents it costs to pay for a reduced price meal. Children from these families should receive high quality free meals at school.
- Extending the provision of current law that requires that "bonus" commodities donated to schools not be counted toward a minimum requirement that twelve percent of all school lunch assistance be in the form of commodities.
- Developing one application for all child nutrition programs and improving linkages between other low-income assistance programs and school meals.
- Conducting Medicaid and State Children's Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP) outreach through the school lunch program and WIC since nearly four million uninsured low-income children are members of households in which at least one child participates in the school lunch program and nearly one million uninsured children live in families receiving WIC.
- Expanding and simplifying the Summer Food Service and the Child and Adult Care Food Programs – including the pilot supper program for low-income children that currently operates in seven states and the 13 state summer food program pilot that eases paperwork and provides the maximum reimbursement for all meals.
- Improving food safety in the school nutrition programs.
- Promoting the use of locally grown foods in school cafeterias.
- Rethinking the WIC program funding structure and considering the use of electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards, as is done with the Food Stamp Program.
- Expanding the WIC farmers market nutrition program.
- Ensuring child nutrition program integrity as well as access by every child who may need it.

We believe that a relatively modest amount of money wisely spent now will significantly save healthcare dollars in the future. It is essential to make an investment in this area and we urge you to provide new funding in your budget for this bill.

Attached is a letter signed by a number of nutrition, anti-hunger, faith-based, professional, and other groups who concur with our assessment. We thank you for your consideration and look forward to working with you to ensure a healthy and bright future for America's children.

Sincerely yours,



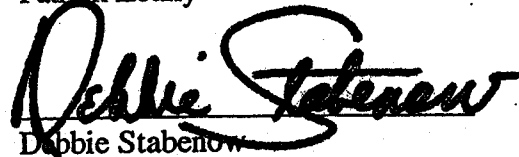
Tom Harkin



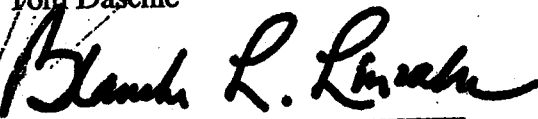
Patrick Leahy



Tom Daschle



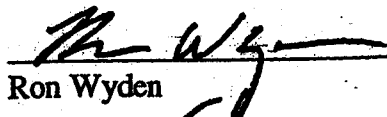
Debbie Stabenow



Blanche Lincoln



Kent Conrad




Ron Wyden



Daniel Akaka



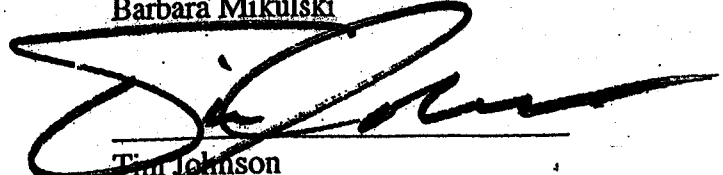
Carl Levin



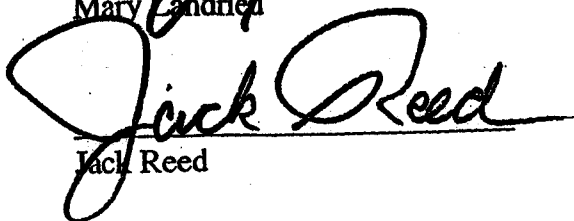
Barbara Mikulski



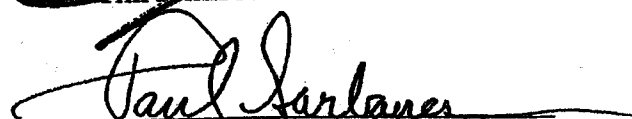
Mary Landrieu



Tim Johnson



Jack Reed

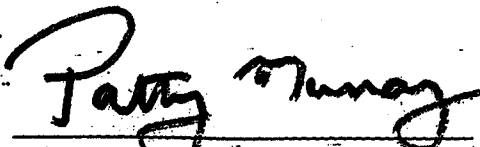



Paul Sarbanes


The Honorable George W. Bush

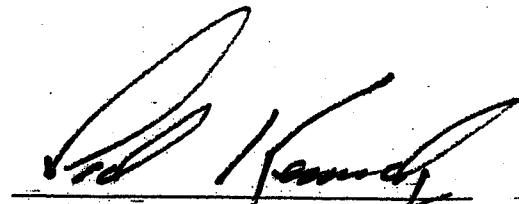
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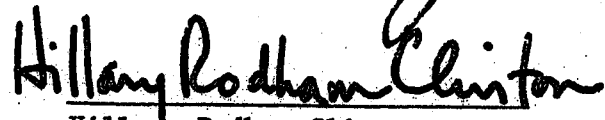
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Patty Murray


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Max Baucus


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